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# James Johnson to retire from state's Supreme Court

Justice James Johnson, considered the most conservative member of the Washington Supreme Court, will retire April 30 because of health concerns.

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Justice James Johnson

Justice James Johnson will retire next month from the Washington Supreme Court due to “recent health concerns,” he announced Monday.

Johnson, who is considered the most conservative member of the court, was not up for re-election until 2016. Instead, he will leave April 30.

He was re-elected to a six-year term without a general-election opponent in 2010.

“This has been a difficult decision, as it has been a tremendous honor to serve the people of the state of Washington for the past 10 years on over 1,000 cases,” Johnson, who goes by Jim, said in a news release. “While I have been grateful for this opportunity, recent health concerns have led me to decide that this was the right time to retire from the bench and spend time with my family and traveling.”

Johnson, a Seattle native, University of Washington School of Law alumnus, Army veteran and former assistant state attorney general, has forged his own path since joining the court in 2004.

Most recently, he has become increasingly critical of his fellow justices for their continued involvement after a court order to put more money into K-12 education. He was the only justice to vote against a ruling ordering the Legislature to write a report on its progress by April 30.

“This court’s expanding control of the Legislature’s funding of education continues to be a violation of the state’s constitution,” he wrote at that time. “This court’s exercise of continuing jurisdiction in this case usurps what is intended to be — and what expressly is — a legislative function and duty.”

The Tacoma News Tribune [reported earlier this month](#) that Johnson would miss much of the court’s winter term due to “unexpected health concerns.” Johnson has not disclosed the nature of the concerns.

On Monday, Chief Justice Barbara Madsen said that, “Justice Jim Johnson has brought an important perspective to the court’s deliberations over the years. While his departure will be a loss for the court, we wish him and his family all the best.”

In a letter to Gov. Jay Inslee, Johnson said he has “endeavored to follow in the footsteps of the Washington state constitutional framers whose legacy is embodied in our citizenry’s robust constitutional Article I individual rights such as free speech, religious liberty and property protection.”

“I have worked to promote the separation of powers and enforce the state and federal constitutions as originally intended and written,” he wrote. “I am grateful for the opportunity to have served all the citizens of the state of Washington.”

Inslee said in a statement that Johnson “offered a unique perspective on the state’s highest bench, and whether you agreed or disagreed with him, he was always ready for lighthearted banter and conversation.”

The governor is expected to appoint someone to fill the seat until it can be filled in the November election.

Three incumbent judges also are up for re-election this year: Mary Fairhurst, Debra Stephens and the court’s other Johnson, Associate Chief Justice Charles Johnson.

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